

CHAPTER 9

PLAN OF CONSERVATION & DEVELOPMENT



LAND USE

Overview

Darien is primarily a single-family residential community, with some areas of Town specifically set aside for multi-family development. There are a number of commercial areas--Noroton, Noroton Heights, downtown Darien, and certain properties extending along the Boston Post Road east towards Norwalk. The Town is especially interested in maintaining its character in light of the development in the adjacent communities of Stamford and Norwalk. Darien needs to take the impact of this nearby development into account in its own planning. Furthermore, Darien has traditionally developed with higher density residential housing located in and around commercial areas and around the two train stations. As one goes further out to the north and south of the Town center, residential development density gets lower.

By their very nature, land uses are related to many aspects of daily life in the Town. Readers should refer to the various other Chapters in this plan for land use issues relating to Environmental Resources, Traffic and Transportation, Housing, Public Facilities, and Parks and Recreation.

Policies

Maintain a primarily low-density residential community.

Continue the commitment to upgrading all of the commercial districts within Town, including, but not limited to, Noroton Heights and downtown Darien to better serve the needs of the Town.

Preserve the Town's open character and scenic features as part of development and/or redevelopment of any property, whether residential or commercial.

Continue efforts to improve community appearance in all zoning districts.

Continue to encourage vibrant commercial areas.

Continue to encourage small business in the DB-1 and DB-2 Zones, encourage the preservation and renovation of existing older structures, and discourage parcel assemblage in these areas.

Maintain the existing zoning density pattern, which encourages higher density development near train stations, and to a lesser extent, near bus routes.

Continue careful monitoring of Special Use Permits to minimize impact on surrounding single family neighborhoods.

Recommendations

Residential-related

1. A sidewalk plan should be developed and implemented in phases over a period of years. Sidewalks near schools, train stations, and/or adjacent to commercial areas, should be given priority.
2. The Darien Zoning Regulations should be amended to specifically require addressing storm drainage as part of development and/or redevelopment of any property.
3. The Town should consider the establishment of large-scale flood control projects.
4. Re-examine home occupation regulations to ensure that they are consistent with changing times and community needs and desires.
5. The existing Darien Library is located in a residential zone. In the event of the Library's moving, efforts should be made to rezone this property to allow condominiums.
6. The Town should continue exploring possible locations for a community center/community pool facility.
7. Property owners should be encouraged to share docks and floats in order to minimize the impacts to Long Island Sound from a multitude of such facilities.
8. Over the next ten years, the Planning and Zoning Commission should continue to study and continue to consider amending the zoning map. This may be appropriate in areas where existing zone boundary lines split properties and are not a set distance from a street.
9. Some residential district boundaries follow streets rather than rear lot lines, split lots between different districts, or do not appropriately reflect existing lot sizes. In large measure, this is due to those lines having been established as measurements back from a street centerline or right-of-way, before a Town lot line base map existed. It is recommended that these residential zoning district boundaries be studied and carefully reviewed for possible adjustment. Some boundaries which follow streets which should be further considered for alteration include:
 - Hoyt Street properties north of Woodway Road, which are split zoned R-2 and R-1/2;
 - Holmes Avenue properties which are split zoned R-1/5 and R-1/3;
 - Fairmead Road properties which are split zoned R-1 and R-1/2;
 - Hecker Avenue properties near Frate Court, which are split zoned R-1/5 and R-1/3.

Commercial-related

1. As part of any future redevelopment of downtown Boston Post Road properties (south side), consideration should be given to providing a direct accessway to the Center Street Lot South from U.S. Route 1.
2. Keep future commercial development consistent with the existing small-town New England character of Darien.
3. Evaluate the Darien Zoning Regulations to determine if they encourage small storefront shops, while discouraging long blank walls.
4. Better publicize the Board of Selectmen's and Planning and Zoning Commission's policies which encourage outdoor dining.
5. Consider the ease of pedestrian access during the site plan review process. This would especially apply to pedestrian access from municipal parking lots to Boston Post Road and other businesses locations throughout downtown.
6. Consider amending the Zoning Regulations to allow perpendicular hanging signs along the front facades in downtown.
7. Create better signage directing people to downtown municipal parking lots. Adopt clearly defined standards for signs in all commercial zones. Expedite approval of conforming signs. Permit administrative approval of conforming sign applications.
8. Index signs in municipal parking lots showing business locations to direct visitors to businesses.
9. Encourage coordination between property owners/developers to minimize curb cuts, and encourage cohesive development in all commercial zones. Parcel assemblage is beneficial in downtown (the CBD Zone) and in Noroton Heights (the DC Zone) to meet these desires.
10. In large commercial districts, such as Noroton Heights and Downtown, one-stop shopping should be strongly encouraged. Shoppers should be encouraged to park once, and visit numerous businesses in the area.
11. Continue to establish sidewalks in all commercial areas and in front of all commercial properties and include other pedestrian amenities such as benches, trash cans, street lights, and crosswalks and pathways to encourage pedestrian access.

12. The Planning and Zoning Commission should work with the Traffic Authority and property owners to eliminate unsafe parking situations, such as backing into Heights Road or Boston Post Road.
13. As trends change through time, the Commission should consider methods to accommodate such in the Darien Zoning Regulations. Examples include, but are not limited to: the provision of day care; wireless telecommunications; home occupations, senior housing developments, cluster housing, hotels, and larger condominiums. The Zoning Regulations should continue to be reviewed to ensure that they meet the changing demographic needs of the community, while maintaining existing community character.
14. Continue to limit (in most circumstances) commercial and business impacts and intrusion on adjacent residential properties and streets.
15. In the Noroton Heights and downtown commercial areas (the DC and CBD Zones), the Planning & Zoning Commission should consider revising the Zoning Regulations to allow a full third floor especially if it would provide some form of housing, with the exception that such a third floor be set back off the road.
16. Encourage the installation/conversion of existing above-ground utilities to be underground.
17. Emergency planning should be continued. Zoning should accommodate this where necessary and appropriate.
18. Develop regulations to encourage redevelopment of the block opposite the movie theatre, to eliminate the 90° parking facing the buildings from Boston Post Road, to encourage parking behind the buildings and access off Corbin Drive.
19. The Commission should consider amending the Zoning Regulations to allow commercial sales and service uses in the Service Business zone via Special Permit under certain requirements, such as if the property is at least three acres in size and is within 1,000 feet of the Central Business District.

Open space-related

1. The Planning & Zoning Commission should consider amending the Subdivision Regulations to require greater open space than the current 10% requirement.
2. The Town should work together with the Darien Land Trust to preserve and protect “natural” open space. This would include a proposal for partial town funding of these efforts introduced by the Board of Selectmen and structured by the Board of Finance that would help provide funding for these efforts. This would be modeled after some of the Private/Public Partnerships in town that have proven successful.

3. The Town should set up a Conservation Easement stewardship effort similar to the Darien Land Trust's. This would be comprised of a formal list of all of the Town-owned properties to assure proper compliance of these easements.
4. The Town should focus on adding open space.
5. Seek legislative authorization for a conveyance tax to be collected by the Town and used solely for acquisition of land for municipal purposes.
6. Consider the establishment of bike paths and greenbelts.

Miscellaneous

1. Consider separating into a separate Planning Commission and Zoning Commission.